

The Unlimited Auspices of Ekadasi

Every single month there are two days of Ekadasi, one while the moon is waxing and the other while the moon is waning. Altogether there are twenty-six Ekadasi's a year. It is said in the Garga Samhita & again quoted in the Ekadasi Mahatmya

yatha sukla tatha krsna
dvayos ca sadrsam phalam
dhenuh sveta tatha krsna
ubhayoh sadrsam payah

"As a white cow and a black cow both give the same kind of milk, so the Ekadasi of the bright fortnight and the Ekadasi of the dark fortnight both bring the same result."

Garga Samhita 4.8.43

Although the Ekadasi days are always potential, they are not all homogeneous. Each of the twenty-six days per year has a distinct flavoursome 'rasa' (taste) and some such as Sat-Tila Ekadasi, Amalaki Ekadasi, and the diademic Nirjala Ekadasi have specific prescriptive activities accompanying them. When coupling ones own current situation, location and meditation with the Ekadasi's own multifaceted qualities there arises a superfluity of tasty, ecstatic rasa.

While Ekadasi is generally considered as pancaratrika vidhi it can become bhagavat vidhi by focusing on prema prayojana - the supreme goal of loving Krsna. Nevertheless the fruits that ripen and freely fall into the hands of one who follows Ekadasi are so abundant that there is always more than enough to go around.

On the auspicious Madhava tithi (another name for Ekadasi) there is auspiciousness for all who follow it's prescriptions, and those who are successful can generously offer percentages of the mammothian results, here, there and everywhere. To be successful is not very difficult, therefore everyone should jump for the good fortune of Ekadasi that descends from the spiritual stratum.

The heaviest stress in following the vrata (vow) is laid on abstinence from eating grains. This principle was taught at a young age by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu:

prabhu kahe,—ekādaṣēte anna nā khāibe

"The Lord said, please do not eat grains on Ekadasi."

The implicit reason for not eating grains on Ekadasi is that the papapurusha - the personification of sin takes refuge there, and since he is sheltered in the grain anyone who eats grains on that day will absorb incredibly concentrated karmic reaction. We have

felt directly the oppressive mood in association of persons who have not followed the Lord's prescription; where at all possible one should avoid those who have eaten grains on the Ekadasi day. What to speak of other's activities, we must be very vigilant that we do not even 'accidentally' take even a minuscule amount of grain on Ekadasi.

"The five types of grains are:

1. Rice or other products made from rice such as flat rice, puffed rice etc.,
2. Wheat flour and White flour etc.,
3. Barley
4. Pulses such as Moong, Chickpea, Green Peas, Lentil, etc.
5. Mustard seed oil and sesame oil.

If one eats any of the above mentioned grains then his vow of Ekadasi will be broken."

Ekadasi Mahatmya

Whilst avoiding negative reaction on Ekadasi is very necessary, this is by far in a way insignificant to the converse positive effect. For by following the vow of Ekadasi, even the sin of killing a Brahmana can be absolved; what to speak of the reactions of other sinful activities.

In the Ekadasi Mahatmya there are compiled, various conversations between Krishna and His exalted devotees such as Yudhistira Maharaja and Sri Arjuna. In these conversations the Supreme Lord tells many wonderful success stories that arose from observance of Ekadasi. In the conditioned state one may doubt the reality of these fantastical results, but he should know that to doubt the words of the Supreme Person is to doubt the highest authority and will not bring him any good fortune. The faith in Ekadasi can be felt by direct experience if one follows the vow himself.

Especially for those in the Grhastha ashram, those who are weak of body or those performing strenuous work, concession can be made in the harshness of following Ekadasi. Simple food can still be taken to facilitate active service and still achieve the result on the pancaratrika side. The bhagavat side to Ekadasi has less to do with the actual fast and more to do with how one spends his time on that day.

upavrittasya papebhyo
yastu baso gunaih saha
upavasah sa vijneyah
sarva bhoga vivarjitah'

'The word upavasa or fasting refers to staying aloof from all kinds of sinful activities and sense gratification.'

The import is to maximise one's time for Krsna. As previously mentioned Ekadasi is Madhava-tithi, Krsna's day. Actually Ekadasi devi is one of Krsna's ananta-rupam – unlimited forms. Twice a month He descends in this form to bless us with the opportunity to get free from the reactions of our sinful reactions. If one is attentive however, they can take advantage of Krsna's condensed presence to associate directly with him, and share transcendental loving exchanges.

“Another name of Ekadasi is Haribasara. The main purpose of observing Ekadasi is to totally please Lord Hari with all ones senses.”

Ekadasi Mahatmya – Introduction

The agreement of atmosphere on Ekadasi is extremely conducive for the fast. This is Krsna's merciful configuration which makes it that much easier for us on this special day. Anyone who has fasted on Ekadasi and attempted to do the same on another less aligned day can perceive the factual difference. Because of the conducive arrangement everyone can take advantage and fast to the best of their ability. By successfully completing the fast, at whatever level; one will receive great satisfaction and determination to fast again. Also, one who fails to complete the fast will develop great strength of mind and resolute determination to be successful next time. Ekadasi is all auspicious! Except for those who eat grains on this day; everyone will receive untold, bountiful, salubrious glory in their life.

“You're all too fat, you all eat too much!”

Mahanidhi Swami – Art of Chanting Lecture Series

While maximising sadhana on the day of Ekadasi, it's practice will also increase one's devotion on all the days that follow. Indeed, Ekadasi purifies past, present and future! By eating simply or fasting completely one will reduce his weight & cholesterol and increase the flow of vital energy (prana.) Srila Prabhupada's quote will enlighten us further in this regard.

We can definitely see that to advance in Krsna consciousness one must control his bodily weight. If one becomes too fat, it is to be assumed that he is not advancing spiritually. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura severely criticized his fat disciples. The idea is that one who intends to advance in Krsna consciousness must not eat very much. Devotees used to go to forests, high hills or mountains on pilgrimages, but such severe austerities are not possible in these days. One should instead eat only prasada and no more than required. According to the Vaisnava calendar, there are many fasts, such as Ekadasi and the appearance and disappearance days of Krsna and His devotees. All of these are meant to decrease the fat within the body so that one will not sleep more than desired

and will not become inactive and lazy. Overindulgence in food will cause a man to sleep more than required. This human form of life is meant for austerity, and austerity means controlling sex, food intake, etc. In this way time can be saved for spiritual activity and one can purify himself both externally and internally. Thus both body and mind can be cleansed.

Srimad Bhagavatam 4.28.35-36, purport

With a healthy and pure body & mind one will be much more receptive to hear the holy-name. The primary activity of all Gaudiya-Vaishnavas. Srila Prabhupada condoned and authorized increasing ones quota of 'rounds' on Ekadasi. Many devotees who are chanting sixteen rounds choose to increase to twenty-five on Ekadasi.

"Why just 25 rounds? You should chant as many as possible. Real Ekadasi means fasting and chanting and no other business. When one observes fasting, the chanting becomes easier. So on Ekadasi other business can be suspended as far as possible unless there is some urgent business."

SP Letter to Jadurani Los Angeles 9th July 1971

"Can we chant 25 rounds on Ekadasi?"

Chant all day, he says. Don't stop at 25.

Satsvarupa dasa Goswami – Prabhupada Meditations

Actually four rounds is called one Granthi, which means knot. Four rounds creates a knot which nicely ties one up in the Maha-Mantra. Therefore twenty-five is an odd number in traditional round counting technique. When counting in Granthi's one can, for example - chant twenty-four rounds on Ekadasi or thirty-two or sixty-four... onwards and upwards.

So the general idea is to increase one's devotional life, engage in bhajan and come closer to Krsna. Hear & Chant, serve the deities in as many ways you can. Cram in a full schedule and there will be no time for Maya. If Maya comes then follow the example of Haridas Thakura, soon she will become 'your' disciple. If your busy working, maybe you can listen to tapes or mp3, kirtan & katha.

An Idle Mind is the devils workshop! If the mind is restless at home, one can go out, organize a mini padayatra with friends, preach or visit holy places. Take bath in holy waters (even the sea is a holy body of water)

In this way there should be no idle time spent, wasted on frivolous activity during the precious time allotted for Ekadasi. If you sleep your fast is broken!

Following the vow of Ekadasi with steadiness, faith and relish will certainly please Lord Krsna. In the Garga Samhita it is authoritatively revealed:

çré-gopya ücuù
vãñabhãnu-sute divye
he rãdhe kaija-locane
çré-kãñëasya prasädärthaà
vada kiiçid vrataà çubham

The gopés said: O Rãdhã, O beautiful, lotus-eyed daughter of King Vãñabhãnu, please tell us what vow we may follow to attain Lord Kãñëa's favour.

Garga Samhita 4.8.7

çré-rãdhovãca
çré-kãñëasya prasädärthaà
kurutaikãdaçé-vratam
tena vaçyo hariù sãkñãd
bhaviñyati na saàçayaù

Sré Rãdhã said: To attain Lord Kãñëa's mercy you should follow the vow of fasting on ekãdaçé. In that way You will make Lord Kãñëa into your submissive servant. Of this there is no doubt.

Garga Samhita 4.8.9

It is important to know and follow the correct time for breaking one's fast. In the morning following Ekadasi, during the Brahma Muhurta one can chant Hare Krsna very attentively, thanking Krsna for Ekadasi, and all the divine, descent days that take place throughout the year.

If one feels very fatigued he can take water before the official breakfast time; this will not break the fast prematurely - only the nirjala element will be broken.

"...water does not break the fast"

Srila Prabhupada - Krsna Book, Chapter 34

If you have made it to the time of breaking fast without even a drop of water, you are allowed to be a little proud of the achievement; but you should remember Krsna's declaration of *bhavanti bhava bhutanam matta eva prthag-vidhah*, That all the various qualities of living beings are created by Him alone. Then you will actually be humbled in knowing that any prowess displayed is coming 'only' by His grace.

"Any fool can go on a fast, but it takes a wise man to break it properly."

George Bernard Shaw

Now comes the real challenge, do you rush to your gullet, stuffing yourself sick with bhoga or do you sensibly and with perfect control of the mind, modestly honor Prasad? Do not be too harsh on yourself if you do over eat on Dvadasi (the day after Ekadasi) When learning to stand on your head you are naturally going to topple a few times, this is OK and no-one can claim to have plonked down in this world fully-formed with all their aptitudes perfectly developed. By regularly practising the vow of Ekadasi one will gradually increase his control over the mind and therefore the stomach also.

A good way to breakfast is to spread it out over a longer period than usual. First you can re-hydrate yourself by drinking water or hot milk thinned with water. Then after some time you can eat a little fruit and maybe some nuts. By taking fibre first, the stomach has something to easily grab hold of. Finally one may take hot food, but again not too much. Spices on Dvadasi, especially in the morning may be inadvisable if one has fasted heavily. The best method may vary from person to person and everyone can cater to some degree, for their own tastes and practicalities. The single best item we have found for near instant recuperation is khir (sweet rice)

Ekadasi is most certainly a great gift from God and we should not become lax in it's observance, thinking 'oh just another Ekadasi' or that 'Ekadasi is just another day of the month.'

Each and every time we even 'try' to observe Ekadasi, Krsna recognises the effort and is so appreciative. Twice a month we have such a nice opportunity for rapidly becoming: fearless, pure, rich in spiritual knowledge, charitable, self-controlled, generous, erudite, austere, simple, non-violent, truthful, free from anger, renounced, tranquil, praise-giving, compassionate, free from covetousness, gentle, modest, steadily determined, vigorous, forgiving, strong, clean, free from envy and free from the passion for honor.

By regular, determined observance of Ekadasi one will definitely win Krsna's ever-increasing affection and, ecstatically skipping up the path back to home, back to Godhead cry blissful tears of love for the Lord.

Bhakta Charles 25/10/08
The Dvadasi Following Ramā Ekadaśī